



Larry Hogan  
Governor  
Boyd K. Rutherford  
Lt. Governor  
Gregory Slater  
Acting Secretary

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February 20, 2020

The Honorable Kumar Barve  
Chairman, House Environment and Transportation Committee  
251 House Office Building  
Annapolis MD 21401

***RE: Letter of Information – House Bill 688 – Use of State or Local Highways – Prohibition or Restriction by Local Authority***

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on House Bill 688 but offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

House Bill 688 would authorize a local authority to restrict or prohibit access on a local or state highway if the roadway is “congested to the point that local traffic and emergency vehicles are unable to effectively navigate the area’s highway network.” The local authority may prohibit all vehicles or restrict traffic to local vehicles only. The local authority is authorized to use signs, barriers, law enforcement presence or checkpoints, and any other methods the local authority determines safe and effective.

The MDOT State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) operates the highways under its jurisdiction to ensure safe and accessible movement for all its users. Currently, local governments may request closure of a State highway by submitting a permit application with the MDOT SHA. In reviewing each unique situation, MDOT SHA must ensure that a traffic restriction is warranted and that the local authority has the necessary tools to safely execute the plan. The MDOT SHA works closely with local jurisdictions to provide guidance and operational expertise as part of the approval process. This ensures that local authorities and State agencies, including law enforcement, can coordinate in managing the impacts of highway closures.

Additionally, removing this important and collaborative process has the potential to adversely affect local businesses and the traveling public during specific projects and associated maintenance of traffic operations. Without coordination between the State and local governments, projects may be unintentionally negatively impacted by a local authority’s decision to exercise its discretionary prohibition and/or restriction. Not only would this cause increased project timelines and costs but most importantly, it could create unsafe and unreliable conditions for travelers.

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The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information when deliberating House Bill 688.

Sincerely,

Tim Smith  
Acting Administrator  
Maryland State Highway Administration  
545-0400

Jeff Tosi  
Director of Government Affairs  
Maryland Department of Transportation  
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